The status of endangered species in national parks: An update

by Loyal A. Mehrhoff and Peter A. Dratch

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THE NATIONAL PARK SERVICE PLAYS A KEY ROLE in restoring plants and animals protected under the U.S. Endangered Species Act. In 2002, 364 federally listed species of plants and animals occurred on lands managed by the National Park Service. An additional 56 species on NPS lands are either proposed for or are candidates for listing; 4 species are managed by the Park Service in a manner that precludes the need for listing (Table 1). Plants comprise the largest group of listed species in the national parks, although a large number of mammals, birds, and fish are also listed (Table 2). Parks in Hawaii, California, and the Southeast contain the greatest number of listed species (Table 3).

In FY 2002, the Natural Resource Challenge provided significant funding to help endangered species. More than $1.5 million has been added to park base budgets to enhance programs for conserving endangered species. In addition, the Natural Resource Preservation Program funded $1.6 million for projects benefiting listed species. These funds are being used to hire additional resource managers and to undertake projects that benefit endangered species. Numerous park projects have benefited from the increases: 20 threatened and endangered plant species in Hawaii Volcanoes National Park are being stabilized; endemic fox populations in Channel Islands National Park are being protected; migrating loggerhead sea turtles are being tracked by satellite; caves important to bats are being gated for protection; populations of wolves, northern spotted owls, and bull trout are being monitored; and populations of seabeach amaranth, harperella, red-legged frogs, and greenback cutthroat trout are being reestablished.

Providing national coordination on threatened and endangered species in the National Park System, the NPS Endangered Species Program accomplished two key goals in 2002. First, staff developed a database detailing the status and trends of endangered species in each park. This database allows the national office, regional offices, and parks to better understand

Table 1. Number of species in the National Park System managed under provisions of the Endangered Species Act

Status	Number of Species
Endangered	261
Threatened	96
Experimental	7
Proposed	4
Candidate	52
Managed via Conservation Agreement	4
Total	424

Table 2. Number of federally listed, proposed, and candidate species in the National Park System by group

Group	Number of Species
Plants	181
Mammals	56
Birds	59
Reptiles	22
Amphibians	6
Fish	50
Insects	13
Snails/Mollusks	33
Other Invertebrates	4

Table 3. Areas in the National Park System with the greatest number of federally listed, proposed, and candidate species

Park	Number of Species
Haleakala National Park (Hawaii)	50
Hawaii Volcanoes National Park (Hawaii)	41
Golden Gate National Recreation Area (California)	35
Channel Islands National Park (California)	34
Point Reyes National Seashore (California)	28
Kalaupapa National Historical Park (Hawaii)	23
Everglades National Park (Florida)	22
Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area (California)	21
Natchez Trace Parkway (Mississippi)	21
Mammoth Cave National Park (Kentucky)	16

Table 4. Population trends of federally listed, proposed, and candidate species in the National Park System

Status Trend in National Parks	Number of Populations	Percentage of Populations
Not at risk	90	8.9
Stable	204	20.0
Increasing	86	8.5
Declining	96	9.5
Extirpated	187	18.4
Unknown	352	34.7
Total	1,015	100.0

the overall success of the National Park Service in protecting and restoring endangered species. For example, the information shows that approximately 37% of the known populations of listed and candidate species in parks are either stable, improving, or not at risk; but it also shows that the status for at least 350 populations has not been determined (Table 4). Using the database, managers can identify species in decline and propose appropriate management actions. As systematic efforts to gather this information continue, the National Park Service will be able to assess how these data are changing and how much progress is being made toward recovering species. Second, the program received funding to collect and store seeds from endangered plants for future use in restoration. The National Park Service intends to collect and store seeds from more than 150 endangered, proposed, and candidate plant species and is cooperating with the USDA National Center for Genetic Resources Preservation (National Seed Storage Laboratory) and the Center for Plant Conservation in this effort.

In the future the National Park Service will increasingly emphasize improving the status of declining species and restoring species that have been extirpated from parks. The overall goal is to make national parks as biologically whole as possible—to maintain current park species and restore them when it makes sense to do so. ■

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